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GREENING STRATEGY PROJECTS AND SECUREMENT FUNDING UPDATE

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the following:

1. the presentation by Ian Buchanan, Manager of Natural Heritage and Forestry, Transportation Services Department, be received;
2. the recommendation contained in the following report, May 28, 2008 from the Commissioner of Transportation Services, be adopted.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of 2008 Greening Strategy Projects currently underway and provide an update on expenditures and confirmation of the allocation of the securement funding for 2009.

3. BACKGROUND

The Greening and Securement Strategies provide for the delivery of a number of environmental programs and projects and the securement of strategic natural heritage properties

The Greening Strategy and Securement Strategy were both adopted by Regional Council in 2001. The Greening Strategy is a program under which a number of the Region's environmental initiatives are coordinated and promoted. The Securement Strategy, funded through an annual commitment of \$1.4 million, operationalizes many Greening Strategy programs and projects. In the 2007 Greening Achievements report (Transportation and Works Committee March 2008), staff committed to report back to Council with an update on 2008 Greening project and programs, and on securement funding and expenditures.

Council's annual contribution of \$1.4 million to Greening is used for programs and projects (\$400,000), and to fund the Greenlands Property Securement reserve (\$1,000,000) for securement of strategic properties

The annual program and project budget is \$400,000. Expenditures include Greening Strategy projects (*Attachment 1*) and partnerships to address objectives and targets, and the salary for the Stewardship Specialist for field delivery of Greening Strategy projects. The successes and achievements associated with these projects are reported on annually in the Greening Achievements Report to Council.

Each year, \$1.0 million is added to the Greening Securement Reserve which is used to support major land acquisition projects, as approved by Council. In addition, the reserve supports the Joint Venture between the Nature Conservancy of Canada and York Region in accordance with Council approved agreements, and funds the salary for the Regional Greening Co-ordinator to deliver the Greening and Securement programs.

Planning and Development Services is the policy lead for the Greening Strategy. Natural Heritage and Forestry Services staff provides input into policy development and advances the Greening and Securement Strategies through program and project implementation.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 GREENING STRATEGY PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS UPDATE

The Greening Strategy implements a number of programs and projects to help secure a healthy natural heritage system for future generations

The Greening Strategy, as adopted by Council, acknowledges that a healthy natural heritage system can be secured in a number of ways. Stewardship involves members of the community protecting and restoring natural features within their neighbourhoods, education raises awareness of the importance of the natural environment to vibrant and sustainable communities; tree planting and restoration projects re-establish lost features and functions.

A number of innovative Greening programs have long term commitments such as the York Natural Planting Partnership and the Adopt a Stream Crossing Program. In addition to these programs, there are a number of projects that are active for a defined time period (one to three years). Programs and projects supported by Greening Strategy funding are frequently matched by partnership dollars at an average leverage rate of 3:1.

In addition to the programs and projects delivered and funded under the Greening Strategy, a number of environmental initiatives delivered by other departments are supported by the Greening Strategy. Support includes providing technical expertise and

in some instances support funding. Some notable examples of 2008 programs and projects are listed below along with the amount of funding that is allocated:

Annual (Ongoing) Programs

The York Natural Planting Partnership	\$100,000 annually
Adopt a Stream Crossing Program	\$20,000 annually
Greening support of Local Municipal Community Tree Planting	\$15,000 annually
Nature's Classroom, York Regional Forest Education Program	\$15,000 annually

Short Term Projects

Peggy's Wood Management Plan	\$11,000 (2008)
Oak Ridges Trail Key Installation	\$4,000 (2008)
Rouge Park Afforestation	\$10,000 (2008)

Greening Supportive Role

Lagoon Conversion to Habitat Wetlands (W&WW lead)	\$0
Sustainability - Natural Heritage Initiatives (P&DS lead)	\$0
Natural Heritage Trails Study (P&DS lead)	\$20,000

A complete list of programs and projects currently underway, and a full accounting of the 2008 Greening Strategy program and project allocation of \$400,000 can be found in *Attachment 1*.

4.2 SECUREMENT FUNDING UPDATE

York Region's Land Securement Program has been extremely successful from 2001 to 2008 with 525 hectares secured on 20 properties with a total land value of over \$30 million

To date, over 525 hectares (1300ac) of conservation lands have been secured on 20 properties with a total Regional contribution of \$3,737,900 from the Greening Securement Reserve. These properties have been secured either independently by the Region, or by partners with support from the Region.

The total value of the 20 properties secured to date is \$32,288,650. This reflects a leverage ratio of approximately 8:1 when considering charitable gestures by landowners (donations and partial donations) and funding provided by partners.

Greening Securement expenditure and area secured vary from year to year as a result of the nature of the land securement negotiation process

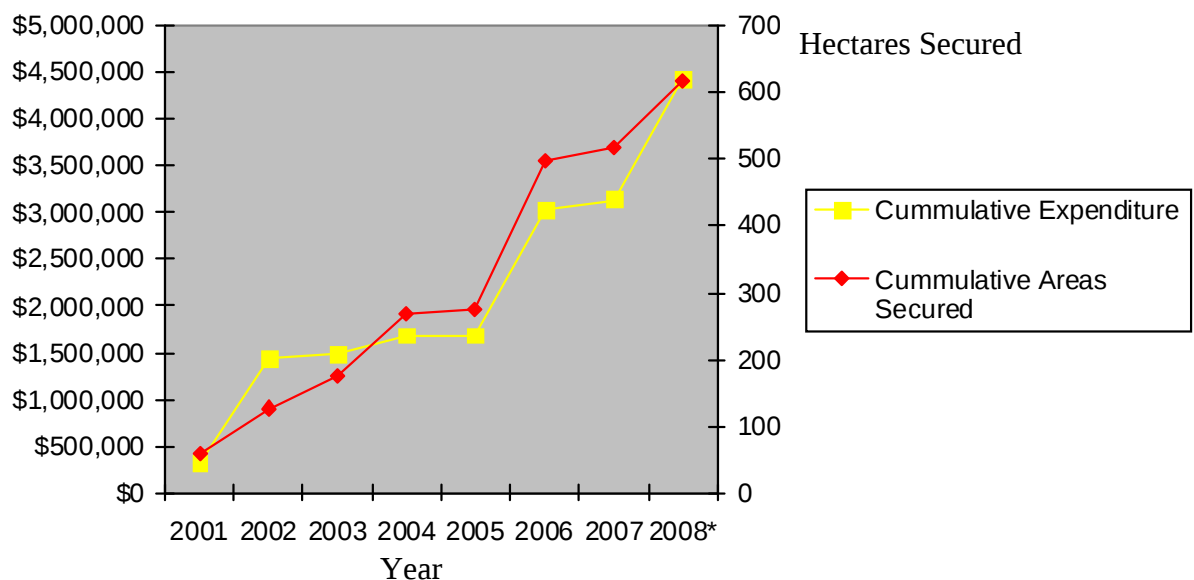
Securing properties for environmental protection involves building capacity with partners, establishing relationships with landowners and, if applicable, going through the Federal Ecogift process. As a result, securing conservation lands can take up to several years per property. The Region works with the following partners through the Land

Securement Working Group, eight of which (identified with an asterix) have adopted securement programs or priorities since the Region adopted the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy in 2001.

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|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority* | 12. Ministry of Natural Resources |
| 2. Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation* | 13. Ducks Unlimited |
| 3. Regional Municipality of Peel* | 14. Credit Valley Conservation* |
| 4. Regional Municipality of Halton* | 15. Town of Markham* |
| 5. Regional Municipality of Durham* | 16. Town of Richmond Hill* |
| 6. Ontario Heritage Trust | 17. Town of Georgina |
| 7. Rouge Park Alliance | 18. Town of East Gwillimbury |
| 8. Toronto and Region Conservation Authority | 19. Town of Newmarket |
| 9. Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust | 20. Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville |
| 10. Oak Ridges Trail Association | 21. Township of King |
| 11. Nature Conservancy of Canada | 22. Town of Aurora |
| | 23. City of Vaughan |

York Region and its partners only obtain natural heritage lands through willing vendors (rather than expropriation). The graph in Figure 1 shows Greening Reserve expenditures and area secured since inception of the program in 2001. The result of a negotiation focus for securing lands is that the timing of securement expenditures is highly variable, with some years having a number of hectares of land secured and others few or none.

Figure 1
Cumulative Annual Expenditures and Lands (hectares) Secured



* Anticipated 2008 results

The relationship between expenditures and lands secured in a given year is non-linear. In some years, where donations or partial donations prevailed, or where properties were secured primarily using partnership funding, the expenditures were low with area (hectares) secured high. In years where strategic opportunities present themselves for acquisition by York Region alone (i.e. expansion of the York Regional Forest), the expenditure may be high relative to the acreage secured.

The balance of the reserve at the end of 2007 was \$5.5 million. At this time, staff are currently working with partners and local municipalities to investigate 40 potential candidate properties. These properties are spread across the Regional landscape and include opportunities in each of the nine local municipalities. Reserve expenditures in 2008 are expected to be in excess of \$1.4 million, and the year end balance for 2008 will likely decrease to \$5 million. This growth of the reserve was anticipated, and allows for the delivery of the program with the acquisition of strategic lands when necessary.

4.3 SECUREMENT PROGRAM – MOVING FORWARD

A preliminary assessment of a targeted land securement approach will help advance the Natural Heritage Directions Paper Actions, which will refine program delivery and propose Regional priorities for securement

From 2001 through 2007 the Securement Strategy has been delivered based on Regional priorities supported by specific criteria. In 2004 Regional Council adopted refined criteria, and the use of an evaluation matrix, to assess individual property opportunities. It has always been recognized that the land securement program also needs to retain operational flexibility to respond to strategic opportunities when they arise. To date, this overall approach has been extremely successful in directing the program, and ensuring that properties secured provide a high cost benefit, and are a priority to the Region.

As the Region's land securement program has evolved, and innovative partnerships have matured, it is recognized that adding a targeted focus to the current criteria and opportunity based approach, could add more vigour to the program. Target areas are evaluated by looking broadly at the Regional landscape and identifying geographically strategic areas. Accordingly, staff has been evaluating the identification of Regional priority areas for land securement. A preliminary review was undertaken to consider implications of a targeted approach. This included (i) assessing priority areas, (ii) determining the land base target within priority areas, and (iii) reviewing financial implications.

Staff conducted an initial assessment of Regional Priority Areas based on a review of the Regional Greenlands System, looking at core habitat nodes and corridors, and identifying strategic opportunities for restoring ecological functions (e.g. linkage). Regional Priority Areas were then further assessed to estimate the land base required, within the priority areas, to protect and enhance the specific ecological functions of each area. This provided

a quantitative assessment of areas of land within each Priority Area to project securement costs based on estimated land values.

For modelling purposes, it was necessary to estimate property values to calculate projected costs. A combination of assessed property values, past experience, and staffs knowledge of appraised values were used to estimate property values.

Staff initiated an assessment to analyze the amount, extent and potential costs of a more targeted securement program. Key issues included balancing the number of years to secure a linked natural heritage system with funding levels and options. These options will be further investigated as part of the Natural Heritage Directions Paper. This preliminary assessment coupled with the past success of the program, provided the context for confirming that the present funding level will meet the current needs of the program.

It is anticipated that the experience and insight from this assessment will further inform the development of a targeted approach to land securement under the advancement of the Region's Sustainability Strategy.

The Natural Heritage Discussion Paper calls for an updated and strengthened natural heritage system

The Natural Heritage Directions Paper undertaken by Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch as part of the Region's Sustainability Initiative includes a number of actions which will influence and refine the delivery of the Greening and Securement Strategies, including:

- Action 1: Update Our Natural Heritage System
- Action 4: Restore and Strengthen the Natural Heritage System
- Action 7: Advance the Greening Strategy

It is anticipated that strategic policy will be developed as the Natural Heritage Direction Paper Actions are implemented in consultation with the public and stakeholders through the fall of 2008 and winter 2009. Results will be reported to Council with recommendations regarding Greening and Securement Strategy delivery. The report will also identify a targeted securement approach with options for funding the program.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies 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.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Greening and Securement Strategies continue to deliver in-the-ground action and value added programs. Funds are leveraged at 3:1 for Greening projects, and 8:1 for Greenland property securement. The balance of the reserve at the end of 2007 was \$5.5 million. Reserve expenditures in 2008 are expected to draw down the reserve resulting in a year end balance approximately \$5 million. There are a number of properties under consideration that may further reduce the balance, therefore the current funding level of \$1.4 million is appropriate for 2009. A further analysis of the Greening and Securement Strategy funding will be undertaken as Natural Heritage Direction Paper action items are considered and brought back to Council.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the Greening and Securement Strategies. Municipalities provide input and are 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 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 and taking action to protect and restore strategic areas.

7. CONCLUSION

The Greening Strategy Programs and projects continue to deliver the in-the-ground results that Council was seeking with the adoption of the Strategy in 2001. Funds are being used to successfully leverage partner dollars at a rate of 3:1 for Greening projects, and 8:1 for securement projects. Contributions to the Greenlands Property Securement reserve have been used to assist in the securement of over 525 hectares on 20 properties with \$5.5 million remaining in the reserve at the end of 2007. At present staff are assessing over 40 candidate property securement opportunities across the Region. Growth of the reserve was anticipated in the development of the program, and allows for the delivery of the program with the acquisition of strategic lands when necessary.

The current level of funding of \$1.4 million is appropriate for 2009, with further rationalization of appropriate funding being brought forward through the Natural Heritage work in support of the Region's Sustainability Strategy.

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.)