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GTA AGRICULTURAL ACTION COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated May 5, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the nine local municipalities for information.

2. PURPOSE

To provide an update of the activities of the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee (GTA-AAC) from June 2007 to May 2008 and on the 2008 Work Plan (*Attachment 1*).

This report also highlights York Region's participation in implementing the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

The GTA-Agricultural Action Committee ensures the implementation of the action items in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan

The GTA-Agricultural Action Committee was established to ensure the implementation of the actions identified in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan and to champion the agricultural industry sector in the GTA. The Region of Peel is the lead for this Committee. The Regional Municipality of York is represented on the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee by Mayor Margaret Black and Mayor James Young (alternate). An Executive Director was appointed in May 2006, to lead the deliver of the Action Plan. Regional efforts towards implementing the Action Plan are also being coordinated through the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO) – GTA Caucus, which is supported by a staff sub-committee - the GTA Agricultural Working Group.

The GTA Agricultural Action Plan was developed through partnership amongst the Regions of Halton, Peel, Durham and York, the City of Toronto, the GTA Federations of Agriculture and the Province. The Action Plan, which was endorsed by Regional Council on January 22, 2005, provides a GTA-wide framework to keep the GTA agricultural

industry competitive through the identification of 37 action items in the areas of economic development, education/marketing, land use policy, accountability and responsibility.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 GTA-Agricultural Action Committee 2007 Annual Report

The Executive Director, on behalf of the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee, is responsible for facilitating the Committee's efforts by providing leadership on matters related to the agricultural industry, and advice on decisions related to priorities and funding. In 2007, the Executive Director:

- Initiated the preparation of a newsletter entitled - Discover: Local Harvest, Local Food, Local Flavour.
- Hosted an exhibit and local food seminar at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair to promote local GTA farms.
- Developed a website for the organization (<http://www.gtalocalfood.ca/home.html>), including a web-based business to business tool for GTA local food.
- Initiated discussions with Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to allocate certain TRCA lands for local food production.
- Developed an RFP to complete a "GTA Agricultural Profile" focusing on the business of farming.
- Initiated discussions with Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to support research on creating a more dynamic local food system.
- Participated in discussions on the Farm Property Tax Assessment Classification, regarding the need to further reduce the tax burden on farming activities, especially market-ready activities.
- Promoted GTA agriculture through 39 speaking engagements to key organizations and boards.

4.2 GTA- Agricultural Action Committee 2008 Work Plan

The approved 2008 GTA-Agricultural Action Committee Work Plan includes the following key activities:

- Celebrating the accessibility of locally grown food in the GTA at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, by hosting an exhibit to promote local GTA farms.
- Explore ways to expand local food options at the Ontario Food Terminal.
- Communicating the challenges and opportunities of near urban agriculture and locally grown food in the GTA
- Examining land use policies that support near urban agriculture.
- Supporting GTA farmers in the development and use of marketing tools for locally grown product.
- Completing a “GTA Agricultural Profile” based on the 2006 Census. The Profile will include farming’s infrastructure, markets for locally grown farm products, farming’s ecological footprint, on-farm value-added activities and the countryside economy.
- Addressing issues related to property taxes for farmland and on-farm value-added activities.
- Participating in initiatives that will change the local food system in the GTA.

4.3 Regional Participation in Implementing the GTA Agricultural Action Plan

The GTA Agricultural Working Group, reporting to the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO), is comprised of planning and economic development staff from the four GTA Regions and the City of Toronto. The GTA Agricultural Working Group has been identified as the lead implementer on nine of the 37 action items in GTA Agricultural Action Plan.

Between June 2007 and May 2008, the RPCO’s GTA Agricultural Working Group participated in/achieved the following:

- Assisted the Executive Director in coordinating the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee’s exhibit in the 2007 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair by providing brochure and display materials and staffing the display booth. York Region designed and provided the background display which consisted of a map showing GTA Farm Fresh locations.
- Action Item 19 of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan directs the development of a GTA Population Profile. The GTA Agricultural Working Group is compiling the 2006 Statistics Canada Census data to develop the GTA Population Profile. The Profile will identify emerging consumer trends and the ethnic and cultural dynamic of

the GTA. The GTA Agricultural Working Group presented a draft of the GTA Population Profile to the RPCO – GTA Caucus for their review and information.

- Action Item 9 calls for a dedicated agricultural economic development officer. York Region staff worked with the York Region Federation of Agriculture in developing a submission to the Agricultural Adaption Council for an “Agricultural Development Officer” to advocate agricultural education and awareness to the non-farm population. The proposal was submitted on behalf of the York Region Federation of Agriculture in partnership with the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture, Region of Durham Economic Development and Tourism Department and the Markham Fair.
- Commented on a Request for Proposal, prepared by the Executive Director, for an update of the GTA Agricultural Profile which describes the business of farming, farming resources, farming infrastructure, markets and on-farm value-added activities.
- York Region staff promoted and marketed Farm Fresh maps and dedicated part of the Tourism website to farmers.
- Reviewed and commented on an update to the 37 action items of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan prepared by agricultural industry representatives. The revisions provide clarity to the action items and include new themes of energy, health and environmental benefits.

4.4 Next Steps for the RPCO - GTA Agricultural Working Group

- Under the direction of the RPCO – GTA Caucus, the Working Group will provide continued support to the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee and Executive Director to ensure the implementation of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan, particularly the nine regional action items.
- Support the Executive Director in preparing/coordinating a Symposium with the partners of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan, scheduled for August 2008. The Symposium will finalize revisions to the action items of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.
- Upon release of the outstanding 2006 Statistics Canada Census data, finalize the GTA Population Profile and present to the RPCO-GTA Caucus. Once received by the RPCO’s and the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee the Profile will be available for public distribution to the industry. This tool will be made available to the agricultural industry to facilitate economic development plans.
- The Agricultural Adaptation Council is scheduled to review the proposal application for an Agriculture Development Officer, Spring/Summer 2008. If funding is provided by the Agricultural Adaption Council, work jointly with the Region of Durham, the

York and Durham Federations of Agriculture and the Agriculture Development Officer to advocate agricultural education and awareness to the non-farm population.

- Participate in the 2008 Royal Winter Fair.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The Enhanced Environmental, Heritage and Culture goal area of Vision 2026 identifies “Sustaining Our Agricultural Base” as an action area. The GTA Agricultural Action Plan is a key strategic initiative to meet the objectives of this Vision 2026 goal.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In 2005, the Province provided the municipalities of York, Durham, Halton and Peel, collectively, a one-time seed funding of \$800,000 to assist with the cost of implementing the recommendations of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. Funding has also been secured through in-kind contributions from the four Federations of Agriculture and the Regional Municipalities. The GTA-Agricultural Action Committee’s Implementation Plan outlines a three year approach for the management of the funding, 2006-2009. Funding is anticipated to last only until year end, 2009.

York Region continues to provide ongoing in-kind support through Council representatives on the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee; and the work of the RPCO and the Agricultural Advisory Working Group. No additional funds are required at this time.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local staff across the GTA has participated in the development of the Action Plan and their continued support is needed to implement certain action items within the Plan.

7. CONCLUSION

The GTA-Agricultural Action Committee is continuing its efforts to champion the agricultural industry sector in the GTA, to ensure the implementation of the actions items in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. York Region continues to support the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee by providing Council representatives on the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee and through the ongoing work of York Region staff in coordination with the GTA-Agricultural Action Committee, in such areas as marketing, research and program development.

For more information on this report, please contact Maria Leonis, Planner, Community Planning at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1568, or Heather Konefat, Director of Community Planning at Ext. 1502.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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