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REGIONAL GREENING STRATEGY REFINEMENT

The Environmental Services Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Ian Buchanan, Manager of Natural Heritage and Forestry;**
- 2. Receipt of the following deputations:**
 - a. Susan Walmer, Executive Director, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust; and**
 - b. Mark Stabb, Central Ontario Program Manager, Nature Conservancy of Canada; and**
- 3. Adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated October 23, 2012, from the Commissioner of Environmental Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- 1. Council adopt the updated Regional Greening Strategy.**

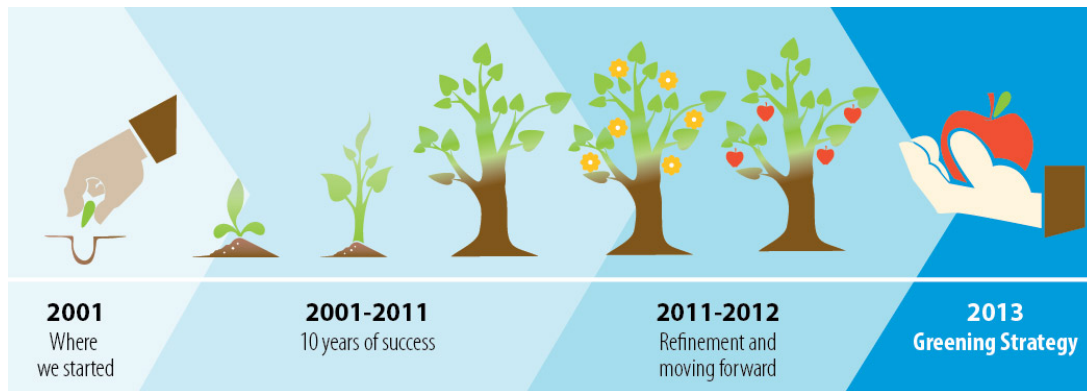
2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the achievements and benefits of the Greening Strategy over the past 11 years and summarize feedback received through consultation with stakeholders, partners and residents. This report also presents a refined approach to the Greening Strategy and schedule for programs, projects and activities over the next 4 years.

3. BACKGROUND

The Greening Strategy has demonstrated strong environmental leadership since Council adoption in 2001. The Greening Strategy is now being updated and adapted to meet the changing needs of the Region's diverse communities and environmental challenges. Staff identified a critical path to deliver an updated strategy which will continue to meet the needs of our residents and businesses moving forward (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Evolution of the Greening Strategy



Regional Greening Strategy was adopted by Council in 2001 to deliver on-the-ground environmental action

Since adoption in 2001, the Strategy has implemented the York Region Official Plan vision for a Sustainable Natural Environment through partnerships and on-the-ground actions to protect and enhance the natural environment and Regional Greenlands system. At its inception, this innovative and forward thinking strategy was recognized through York Region's 2001 receipt of the 'Excellence in Planning' award from Ontario Professional Planners Institute.

Greening Strategy boasts eleven years of significant on-the-ground achievements and environmental leadership

Since 2001, the Greening Strategy has delivered actions that have improved our natural environment. Some notable achievements include planting almost 1,000,000 trees and shrubs, and securing over 1,000 hectares of environmental lands. With more than 50 active partnerships, York Region has leveraged significant actions and results. In conservation land securement, an \$11.2M Regional investment leveraged the securement of over \$52.7M of environmental lands. In more recent years, York Region's environmental innovation, delivered through the Greening Strategy, was recognized when awarded the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators Environmental Award in 2009. Achievements are reported to Council annually.

Significant on-the-ground action is on track for delivery in 2012 including 60,000 trees and shrubs planted, 120 hectares of environmental lands in the process of being secured, and delivery of 90 stewardship and education events to date. Details will be reported in the 2012 Greening Strategy Achievements report to Council early in 2013.

York Region Official Plan - 2010 and Sustainability Strategy recommend the Greening Strategy be updated

The York Region Official Plan and the Sustainability Strategy identified the need to review and refine the Greening Strategy to ensure alignment with current environmental pressures and core business. With 2011 marking the 10 year anniversary of the Greening Strategy the timing was appropriate to reach out to stakeholders and residents to confirm the delivery approach and refine the future strategy direction.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Consultation with more than 800 stakeholders and residents informed the refinement

In the fall of 2011 multiple engagement mechanisms and forums were used to reach out to over 800 York Region residents, partners and stakeholders. This extensive engagement strategy included:

- Community Engagement Strategy: two focus groups and an on-line survey
- Environics Research: phone surveys and four public focus groups
- Public and stakeholder engagement through partnership workshops
- Two public information forums
- On-line survey of focussed stakeholders on options and priorities
- Municipal Environmental Advisory Committee forum
- Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group meeting
- York Regional Forest Advisory Team – 2 meetings
- Liaison with Lake Simcoe Stewardship Network
- Internal working sessions with York Region departments including: Environmental Services, Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, Community and Health Services, Transportation and Community Planning, and Finance and Legal Services.

Stakeholder engagement sessions confirmed the importance of the environment, recognized York Region's strategic leadership, and provided direction and focus.

Environics survey concluded residents believe it is important to protect the natural environment and York Region has a role to play

Environics Research Group was commissioned to investigate York Region resident's knowledge of the natural environment, the York Regional Forest and the Greening Strategy. Findings include:

- 75 per cent of York Region residents surveyed think protecting the natural environment is 'very important'

- 97 per cent of those surveyed supported that York Region plays a critical role in protecting the environment
- 88 per cent support the Region's role in on-the-ground action, including planting trees

Municipal Environmental Advisory Committees continue strong support, would like more of the same and expansion into new areas

Members from these municipal committees shared ideas on conservation, naturalization and sustainable communities. Municipal Environmental Advisory Committees typically include Council members, staff and local environmental stakeholders. A semi-annual forum for all York Region Environmental Advisory Committees is coordinated by York Region under the auspices of the Greening Strategy, to collaborate and share best practices. As municipally focused, vocal and engaged environmental groups, it is important to directly consult with these Committees. Input on future actions included suggestions in areas of naturalization, environmental restoration, environmental education, energy and water conservation, waste reduction, green technology, sustainable communities, monitoring and public transportation.

Agricultural Community is seeking collaboration and recognition of agricultural land ecological goods and services

With 38 per cent of York Region's land area designated for agricultural use, engagement of the farming community was important. Agricultural land and farming activities represent a significant opportunity to both protect and restore environmental features and functions. The York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group was consulted and Ontario Farmland Trust participated throughout the consultation. It was clearly heard that there are opportunities for environmental protection that are compatible with sustainable agriculture. More collaboration with the agricultural sector is needed to further scope opportunities of mutual interest and priority projects. Early areas of synergy include (i) a review of farm land securement interests coupled with priority environmental preservation, and (ii) the opportunity to explore a partnership with Alternate Land Use Services, which is an environmental conservation program spreading across Canada designed by farmers for farmers. These initiatives will reinforce and focus on the significant ecological goods and services provided by agricultural land across York Region.

Partner workshops highlighted the high value of York Region's leadership role and the need to investigate a broader suite of partnerships

Two workshops were held to engage with existing and potential partners and stakeholders. Participants included:

- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust
- Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition
- Ontario Farmland Trust
- University of Toronto
- Toronto and Region Conservation
- Local Municipalities
- Ontario Nature
- York District School Board
- Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority
- Rouge Park
- Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests

One workshop focused on environmental land securement activities and the other focused on on-the-ground action. Multiple stakeholders across a broad range of interests emphasized strong support for the Strategy in both sessions. The Region's partners agreed that the Strategy is unique and is recognized as groundbreaking. Information gathered at these workshops was important in developing refinements for future action. A key comment received was to engage a broader suite of partners for environmental initiatives, including industry, health based organizations, the private sector and schools. This additional consultation and scoping will be incorporated in the work program over the next 2 years.

Community engagement provided key input and direction to Greening Strategy programs and projects

The following key messages and ideas emerged through the consultation process:

- Residents emphasized that protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment is important, and that York Region should continue to be involved
- Unanimous support for the Greening Strategy as a key Regional delivery mechanism towards achieving a sustainable natural environment
- Need to further scope linkages, synergy and environmental opportunities with the agricultural community. For example, investigate Alternative Land Use Services and review opportunities with the Ontario Farmland Trust
- Need to emphasize linkages between the environment and public health benefits (e.g. clean air, clean water, shade) and develop a closer alignment with Community and Health Services initiatives and support the objectives of the Community and Health Services Multi-year Plan. Staff will work closely with Health Protection and Healthy Living Divisions.
- Engage a broader suite of partners for program delivery; such as industry, private sector, schools etc.
- Adjust programs and promotion in response to changing demographics (e.g. age, income, culture, faith)
- Urban areas - provide more opportunities for on-the-ground action and educate people about the benefits of the urban forest
- Ensure effective community engagement through promotion, communication and sharing of information on programs and environmental benefits

- Species at risk - explore opportunities to protect species and restore habitats. Review efficiencies and opportunities in support of streamlining endangered species protection and mitigation associated with Regional infrastructure projects
- Trails and the environment – strategic opportunity to link communities and natural areas through trail networks to connect people to the environment

Greening Strategy Action Areas have been realigned and re-defined

The 2001 Greening Strategy originally identified nine broad delivery themes: information, naturalization, land securement, environmental education, Regional operations, legislation, urban forest, green partnerships and monitoring. These themes have been refined into four focussed Action Areas giving consideration to current Regional priorities, effective delivery, plain language and program clarity. Brief descriptions of each Action Area and its goal have been articulated in the refined Greening Strategy (*Attachment 1*).

Refined Action Areas and implementation are summarized as follows:

1. **Enhancement and rehabilitation:** private land tree planting, species at risk (*NEW*), public land naturalization, and naturalization of Regional properties
2. **Stewardship and education:** educational programming, outreach events, public engagement and marketing
3. **Environmental land securement:** natural environment land securement, natural heritage trail linkages (*NEW*), agricultural land natural feature protection (*NEW*)
4. **Leadership, innovation and knowledge:** technology/innovation, sharing and transfer of technical knowledge, sustainable communities, investigate funding opportunities

Integral to effective delivery of the Strategy are key delivery mechanisms or tools such as partnerships, financial leverage, community involvement and the role of legislation and policy.

Consultation feedback supported use of York Regional Forest building location for a new consolidated facility incorporating stewardship education, meeting space and operational capabilities

The York Regional Forest buildings at the Hollidge Tract in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville require replacement. The main building was initially constructed as a barn in the 1930's and then other storage areas were constructed in the 1950's and 1960's. The Hollidge Tract location is central to the majority of existing York Regional Forest properties. Positive feedback from the refinement consultation, our pilot project with the school board, and other education programs support the use of this environmentally

significant location on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Having the facility central to most York Regional Forest properties is also cost effective and efficient for ongoing forest operations.

This location and project, on the Oak Ridges Moraine in Canada's first Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified publically owned forest, presents a unique opportunity. Existing buildings include; a forestry operations 3 bay garage, a Nature's Classroom (capacity 50 people) outdoor education room with operations storage, washroom facilities, and a forest boardroom with a kitchenette, office washroom and front counter. These buildings are beyond their useful life and require significant maintenance and repair. Replacing these facilities is more cost effective than supporting the ongoing investment in the existing facilities. A new consolidated facility incorporating stewardship education, meeting space and operational capabilities is planned.

York Regional Forest Stewardship and Education building replacement is key for the delivery of environmental stewardship and education

The new facility will provide a continued platform for environmental stewardship and education. Programs, educational signage and demonstrations that provide information on endangered species activities, invasive species management practices and sustainable forest management, among others, will be available. Additional synergies with education and awareness of water conservation and source water protection will also be profiled.

The facility review and replacement program was initiated in 2010 when Property Services prepared a report highlighting the need to replace these assets. The project was initially highlighted to Council in the 2011 budget process (Transportation Services). Since that time, feasibility reports, engineering studies (e.g. water, soils), natural heritage studies, has been completed and architectural design and engineering works have been initiated to advance the project. The 2013 budget submission supports construction of the facility.

Greening Strategy delivery provides opportunities to demonstrate and profile the protection and rehabilitation of species at risk

The Greening Strategy proposes to investigate new opportunities to protect and enhance species and habitats at risk. Previous projects have benefited endangered species including the Redside Dace, Jefferson salamander and the butternut tree.

Projects could assist with meeting regulatory requirements associated with endangered species legislation and permit requirements. This is an opportunity for efficiency in assisting with capital infrastructure project delivery (e.g. water, wastewater, roads and transit). One example of a current project is the development of a list of candidate restoration sites for Redside Dace, an endangered fish. This work will help expedite

approvals associated with the need to undertake additional restoration works, if required on a capital project.

Greening Strategy contributes to green infrastructure and benefits human health, local economy and the natural environment

All four Action Areas in the Greening Strategy contribute to a healthy, sustainable natural environment and complete communities through protecting and enhancing green infrastructure. Green infrastructure takes many forms including: urban forests and woodlots, wetlands, waterways and riparian zones, meadows and agricultural lands, green roofs and green walls, parks, gardens and landscaped areas, wetlands and storm water ponds.

Green infrastructure as defined by the Green Infrastructure Coalition of Ontario (2012) is: “natural vegetative systems and green technologies that collectively provide society with a multitude of environmental, social and economic benefits.”

Government and non-government organizations recognize the value and contributions of green infrastructure

High profile groups and individuals are increasingly vocal in recognizing of the broad values and benefits of green infrastructure. It is a fundamental way of thinking, which will reconnect the natural environment to people and communities. There are many examples or case histories that demonstrate the benefits of natural capital connections. A few of these are discussed below.

Urban forest studies conducted in three York Region municipalities estimate annual energy cost savings of more than \$5M and air pollution reduction valued at \$7.2M

Urban Forest Studies recently undertaken by York Region in partnership with local municipalities, (Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Markham) concluded that cumulatively:

- More than \$5M is saved annually through a reduction in energy costs from the existing tree canopy cover through shade in summer months and insulating qualities in winter months.
- 830 tonnes of air pollution are removed by the urban forest with an approximate value of \$7.2M annually and the benefit increases with tree size. The Ontario Medical Association 2008 Illness Cost of Air Pollution report states that exposure to air pollution in York Region was associated with approximately 590 premature deaths.

Green infrastructure provides a broad range of benefits for water quantity and quality improvements including source water protection. In 2012, the US Forest Service

determined that in a given watershed the cost of treating drinking water increases 20 per cent with every 10 per cent loss of forest cover.

Economic value of ecosystem services estimated at \$975M annually for the Lake Simcoe watershed and \$84 billion across Ontario

The economic value of ecosystem services in the Lake Simcoe watershed basin is estimated at \$975 million per year, this translates to \$2,780 per capita annually according to a report commissioned by the David Suzuki Foundation entitled: Lake Simcoe Basin's Natural Capital: The Value of the Watershed's Ecosystem Services (2008).

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources commissioned a natural capital study (2009), which estimated the value of ecosystem services in southern Ontario to be a total yearly benefit of \$84 billion.

Green infrastructure improves community resilience

Ontario's Environmental Commissioner's 2010/2011 Annual Report stated that "Ontario needs to prepare for the twin challenges of a rapidly growing population and a less predictable future climate, marked by more extreme weather events and higher flooding risks. Green infrastructure can increase the resilience of our communities and landscapes, and help us face the stormy weather ahead."

The refined and updated Greening Strategy helps position the Region to meet these challenges head-on through a focus on protecting and growing our green infrastructure.

The Greening Strategy has been refined based on previous successes and informed through consultation and community engagement

The Region has consulted with stakeholders, partners and residents and gathered key information. Four strategic Action Areas have been identified. Staff consolidated this information into a refined Greening Strategy, which provides clear direction for future programs, projects and activities with the flexibility to adapt to changing community and environmental needs (*Attachment 1*).

The Greening Strategy identifies current and potential programs, projects and activities with associated performance indicators to provide solid measures of success for future years.

For example:

- Enhancement and Rehabilitation - private land tree planting through the York Natural Planting Partnership targets a minimum of 50,000 trees and shrubs annually

- Environmental Land Securement – in partnership with the Natural Greenlands Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy of Canada target additional lands for securement

The Strategy will be reviewed every five years to ensure it remains current and achievements will continue to be reported to Council annually. The next update on achievements is planned for Q1 2013.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The refined Greening Strategy supports York Region Official Plan policies in the areas of Sustainable Natural Environment, Healthy Communities, Building Cities and Complete Communities, and Agriculture and Rural Areas. The Greening Strategy is recognized as an influential document for Vision 2051 and supports seven of the eight goal areas. It is a key delivery mechanism for a sustainable natural environment as articulated in both the 2007 Sustainability Strategy and 2007 Natural Heritage Strategic Directions report.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Proposed 2013 Greening Strategy funding increase will support delivery of the refined Strategy

The 2001 Greening Strategy and Land Securement annual budget was \$1,400,000. This allocation was decreased in 2006 to \$1,350,000. Since that time, \$1,350,000 has been budgeted annually to deliver the Greening Strategy, including land securement. During this same timeframe, land values across York Region have increased an average of 50 per cent. In addition, a number of strategic funding partners and options are no longer available. For example, the Greening Strategy once leveraged significant funds from Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (\$1,387,667) and the City of Toronto Head Water Protection Fund (\$3,910,910) however, both of these funding sources are no longer available. A proposed increase of \$350,000 is included in the 2013 business plan and budget and will be considered as part of the overall 2013 Regional budget process.

The increased budget allocation will:

- Reinforce York Region's commitment to securing priority greenlands and linkages through ongoing and new partnerships
- Allow for the evaluation of new strategic partnership opportunities and implementation of pilot projects e.g. with the agricultural community
- Allow targeted projects to enhance habitats for species at risk to move forward, e.g. butternut tree conservation, Jefferson salamander recovery
- Contribute to increased delivery of environmental education and on-the-ground actions in the urban landscape in partnership with local municipalities

- Facilitate linkages, common messaging and leverage opportunities to promote healthy environments, healthy sustainable communities and active lifestyles across the Region

As part of the 2013 budget submission, a Capital Funding request of \$3,391,000 for replacing the York Regional Forest Stewardship and Education Centre building is planned. This building will replace existing facilities, which support the forest operations function, are a trail head for environmental education programming and provide a meeting room. The project will be funded through existing reserves.

A funding application has been submitted to a federal/provincial funding program (Community Infrastructure Improvement Fund) to offset capital funding requirements for this new infrastructure project. A decision on this application is expected in late 2012. If successful, 30 per cent funding contribution is expected for this capital project.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Greening Strategy continues to leverage funds and resources through partnerships to protect and enhance the Region's natural environment.

All nine local municipalities have benefited directly from the Greening Strategy, and have a strong history of involvement in environmental projects and programs. The refinement of the Greening Strategy helps to clarify the Regional interest, and program delivery will continue to provide local municipalities and residents with opportunities to enhance the natural environment.

7. CONCLUSION

Over more than a decade York Region has been recognized for its innovative leadership in developing and implementing the Greening Strategy. The Strategy has proven to be an effective and successful delivery mechanism, achieving significant results towards a sustainable natural environment, including planting almost 1 million trees and securing 1,000 hectares of land. In addition to benefits to the natural environment, success of the Strategy contributes to the health and well being of York Region residents and represents a sound investment in green infrastructure. Based on the recent consultation, York Region's community is pleased with and supportive of the Greening Strategy and it is clear that York Region has a leadership role in environmental sustainability. The Greening Strategy refinements and defined Action Areas are forward thinking and consistent with policies of the York Region Official Plan - 2010 and Vision 2051.

For more information on this report, please contact Ian Buchanan, Manager of Natural Heritage and Forestry at 905-830-4444 Ext 5204 or Laura McDowell, Director of Environmental Promotion and Protection at Ext. 5077.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the agenda for the November 7, 2012 Committee meeting.)

Greening Strategy Refinement

**Presentation to
Environmental Services Committee**

**Ian Buchanan
Manager of Natural Heritage & Forestry
November 7, 2012**

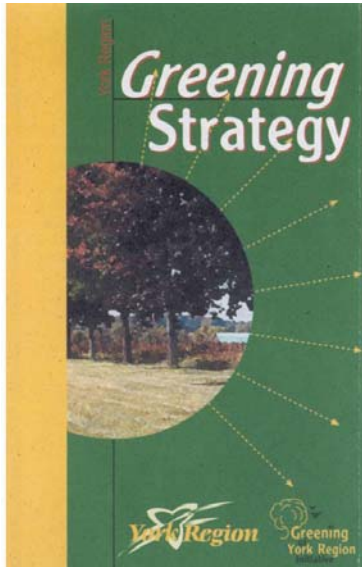
Presentation Overview

Greening Strategy Refinement

- ❑ Greening Strategy - evolution
- ❑ Achievements
- ❑ Link to Council approved plans
- ❑ Community engagement & outreach
- ❑ What was heard
- ❑ Refined Strategy
- ❑ Benefits



Greening Strategy - Evolution



Developing policy and inspiring action. It is our blueprint for on-the-ground action. York Region's Greening Strategy will create and maintain healthy natural environments that foster healthy, sustainable communities for current and future generations.



Regional Greening Strategy adopted by Council on May 12, 2001

2001-2012 Achievement highlights

- ❑ Almost 1,000,000 trees planted
- ❑ Over 1,000 hectares of environmental lands secured in public ownership
- ❑ 50+ partnerships e.g. Nature Conservancy of Canada, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Conservation Authorities, Municipalities
- ❑ Engaged over 29,000 residents through environmental stewardship and outreach
- ❑ Proud recipient of awards e.g. Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators Environment Award (2009)



Link to key Council approved plans

- ❑ Supports York Region Official Plan policies: Sustainable Natural Environment, Healthy Communities, Building Cities and Complete Communities, and Agriculture and Rural Areas
- ❑ Greening Strategy recognized as an influential document for Vision 2051 - supports 7 of 8 goals
- ❑ Key delivery mechanism for Sustainability Strategy and Natural Heritage Strategic Directions in the area of Sustainable Natural Environment
- ❑ Investment in Greening and Forestry programs pays dividends in other areas and advances multiple Council goals



2011 – Community Engagement and Outreach



Surveys

Environics: phone survey, focus groups (4)

Community Engagement Strategy: focus groups (2)

On-line survey

Public and Stakeholder engagement

Partner workshops (2)

Public Information Center (2)

Environmental Advisory Committee Forum

Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group

Regional Forest Advisory Team

Lake Simcoe Stewardship Network (presentation)

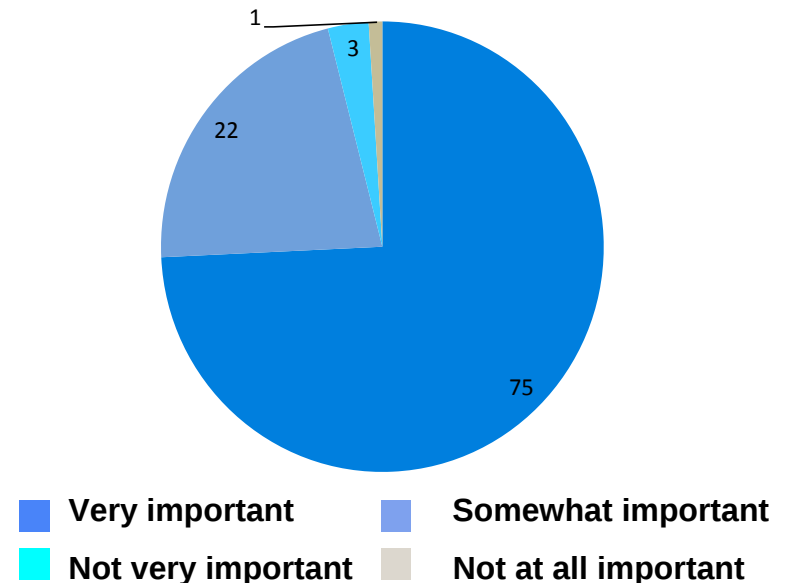
Regional Department Working Sessions

800+ individuals were consulted during the Greening Strategy refinement

What Was Heard

- ❑ Resident responses:
 - ❑ important for York Region to invest in protecting and enhancing the natural environment
 - ❑ York Region should be involved
- ❑ Low knowledge of what York Region is doing for the natural environment
- ❑ Tree planting and environmental education are top of mind for action

How important is protecting and enhancing the natural environment to you? Is it...?



75% of residents think protecting the natural environment is “very important”

What Was Heard

Continue:

- ✓ Greening Strategy is a key Regional delivery mechanism for sustainable natural environment and on-the-ground action
- ✓ Unanimous support for the delivery model
- ✓ York Region is recognized as a leader - particularly for land securement
- ✓ Recognized as a leader in forest management - York Regional Forest

Enhance Delivery:

- Explore more opportunities for greening in urban areas
- Connect with other partners such as industry, private sector, school etc.
- Emphasize links between the environment and public health benefits
- More environmental education
- Get the word out about existing programs

What Was Heard

New Opportunities (examples):

- ❑ Natural heritage trails – connecting people and the environment
- ❑ Scope opportunities with agriculture community
 - Ontario Farmland Trust partnership
 - Alternate Land Use Services
- ❑ Species at Risk – habitat and populations
- ❑ Adjust programs and promotion in response to changing demographics in the Region (age, income, culture, faith etc.)



Managing our forests, nurturing our street trees and planting more trees improves air quality, contributes to liveable communities and helps combat climate change

Refined Strategy – 4 Action Areas

1. Environmental Land Securement

Target: Pursue a minimum of 6 sites or 65 hectares secured annually

Goal: Protect core natural areas and restore linkages

1. Natural Environment Land Securement
2. Natural Heritage Trail Linkages *NEW*
3. Agricultural Land natural feature protection *NEW*

2. Stewardship & Education

Targets: Annually coordinate 60, support 25 and actively participate in 15 partner-led events, outreach to 50,000 people annually through programs and communications

Goal: Educate residents about the value of green infrastructure, provide opportunities to discover connections with nature, and inspire action

1. Education programming
2. Outreach events
3. Public engagement through marketing

***Delivery mechanisms:** Partnerships, Agreements and Contracts, Resource and Financial Leveraging, Community Involvement & Engagement, Incentives, and Policy and Legislation*

Refined Strategy – 4 Action Areas

3. Enhancement and Rehabilitation

Target: A minimum of 70,000 trees and shrubs planted annually

Goal: Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on both public and private lands

1. Private land tree planting
2. Species at Risk *NEW*
3. Public land naturalization
4. Naturalization of regional properties

4. Leadership, Innovation & Knowledge

Targets: Co-ordinate 4 information sharing forums and present at 2 conferences annually, submit three funding applications annually to leverage funding

Goal: Seek and transfer knowledge, demonstrate leadership and innovation in protection and promotion of natural environment.

1. Technology/Innovation
2. Sharing & dissemination of technical knowledge
3. Sustainable communities
4. Funding opportunities

Delivery mechanisms: Partnerships, Agreements and Contracts, Resource and Financial Leveraging, Community Involvement & Engagement, Incentives, and Policy and Legislation

Diverse Benefits

CORPORATE PLANS

- York Region Official Plan
- Vision 2051
- Sustainability Strategy
- Natural Heritage Strategic Directions
- Climate Change Discussion Paper
- 2011-2015 Strategic Plan
- Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan
- Economic Strategy – Strategic Direction to Enhance the Quality of Place



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Increased forest cover
- Support for biodiversity and pollination
- Increased species at risk habitat
- Protected forest cover
- Climate change mitigation - greenhouse gas reduction through carbon sequestering
- Water quality improvement
- Stormwater retention

Environmental Land Securement

Enhancement and Rehabilitation

Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge

Stewardship and Education

Greening Strategy



SOCIAL BENEFITS

- Liveable and complete communities
- Source Water Protection
- Improved air quality
- Proactive health care through increased opportunities for physical activity
- Environmentally aware and responsible communities
- Preserve water quality
- Support an active community through securement of a Greenlands Trails system
- Reduced urban heat island effect

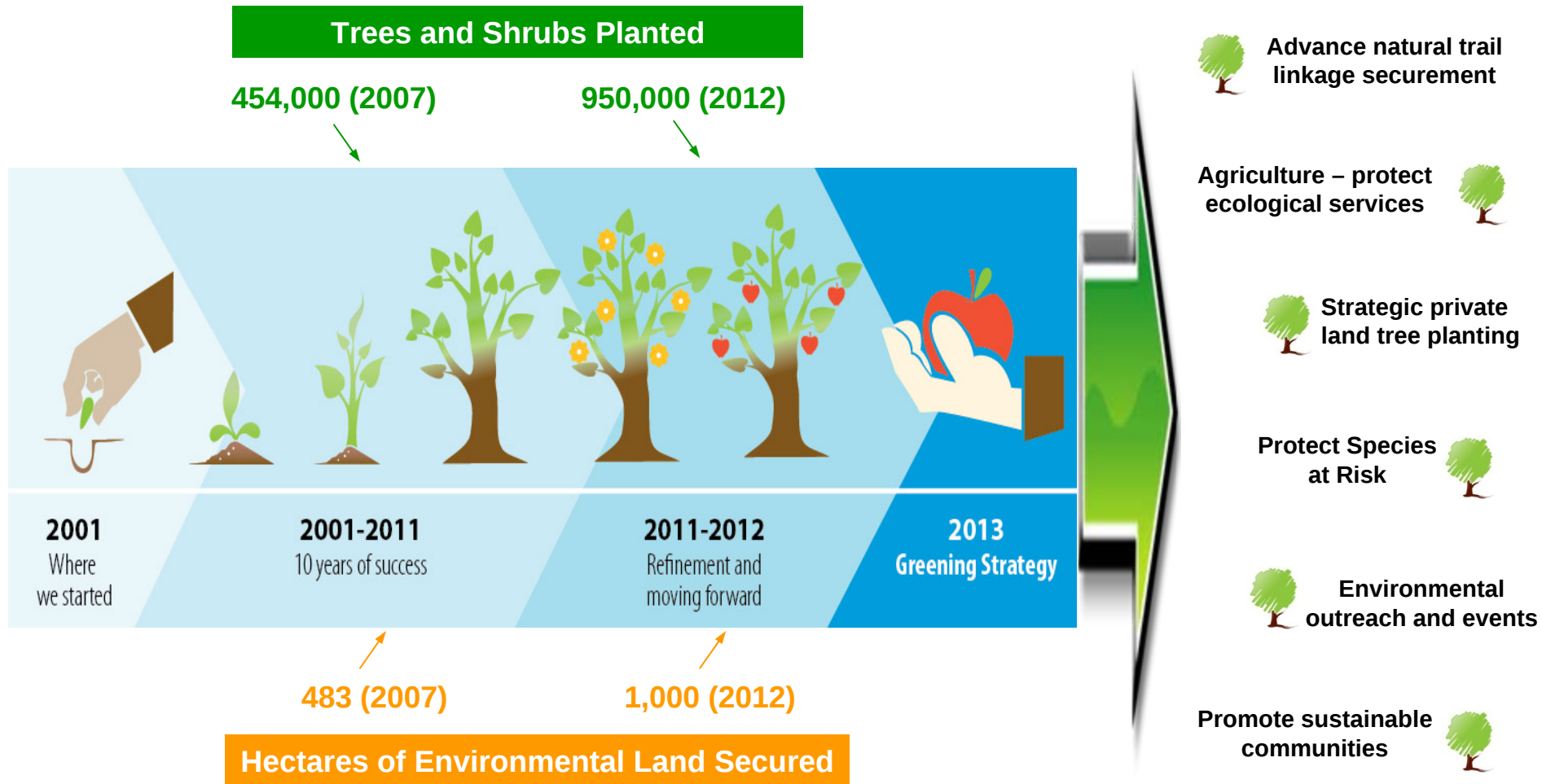


ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Energy conservation
- Built infrastructure longevity
- Efficient program delivery
- Tourism opportunities
- Water quality treatment cost reduction

Investing in Greening Strategy leverages limited budget dollars that create multiple benefits

Moving Forward



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

GREENING STRATEGY

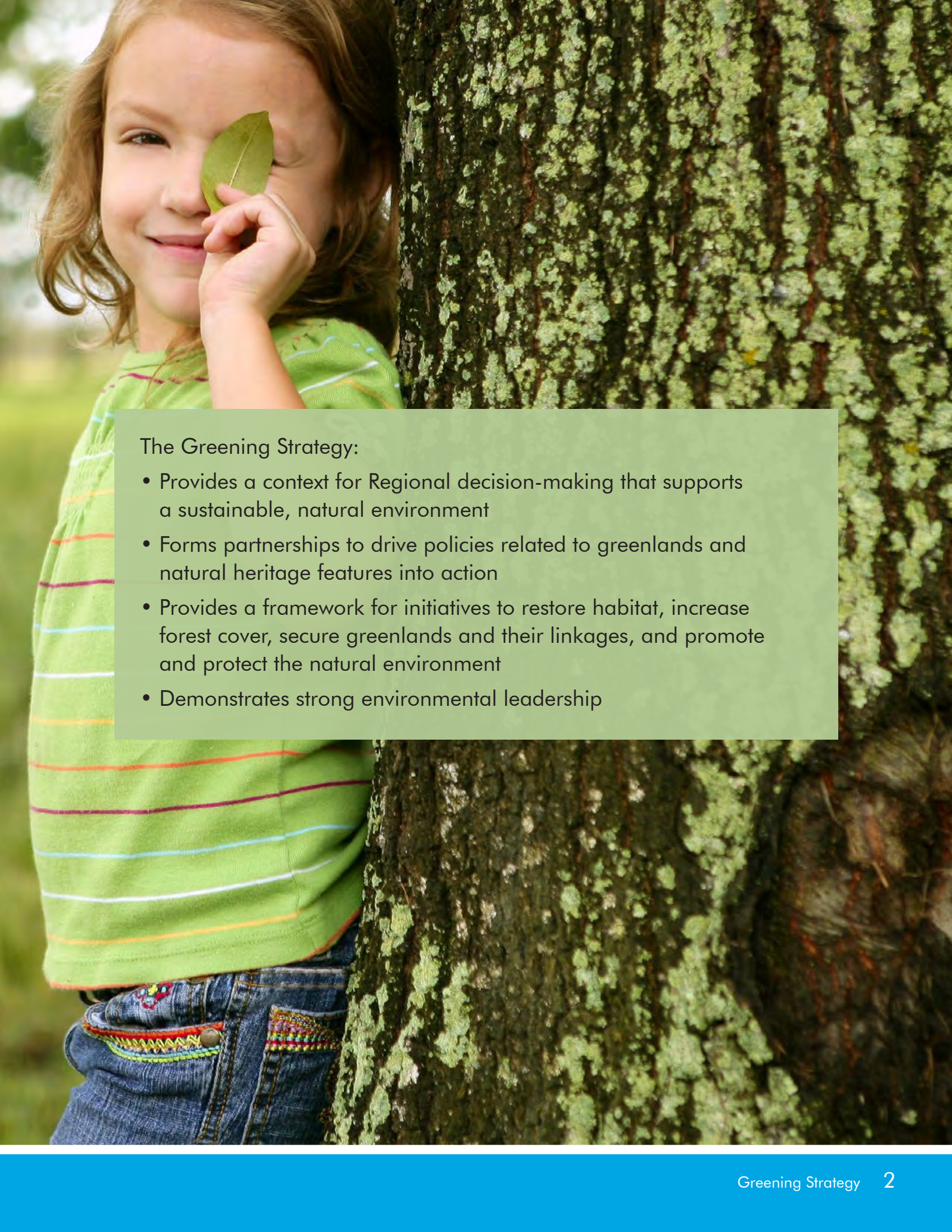
INSPIRING ACTION





Developing policy and inspiring action. It is our blueprint for on-the-ground action. York Region Greening Strategy creates and maintains healthy natural environments that foster healthy, sustainable communities for current and future generations.

After more than 10 years of success, the Region's Greening Strategy is adapting to meet the changing needs of the diverse communities and environmental challenges. Clear direction from the York Region Official Plan (2009) and the Sustainability Strategy identify the need to review and refine the Greening Strategy.



The Greening Strategy:

- Provides a context for Regional decision-making that supports a sustainable, natural environment
- Forms partnerships to drive policies related to greenlands and natural heritage features into action
- Provides a framework for initiatives to restore habitat, increase forest cover, secure greenlands and their linkages, and promote and protect the natural environment
- Demonstrates strong environmental leadership

ACHIEVEMENTS

Since 2001 the Greening Strategy has delivered actions that have both protected and restored our natural environment.

Together with our partners we have achieved great things:

- Planted close to one-million trees and shrubs
- Secured more than 1,000 hectares of environmental lands
- Formed 50 strategic partnerships, which enable leveraging of significant action and results
- \$11.2 million Regional investment in conservation land securement with a combined worth of more than \$56 million in environmental lands secured
- Received numerous awards: the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators Environmental Award in 2009 for environmental innovation, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification for the York Regional Forest for sustainable management
- Developed best management practices and guidelines for Salt Management Guidelines, Streetscaping Policy and Pesticide Reduction Guidelines, Forest Conservation Bylaw
- Maintained the Region's forest cover at 22.5 per cent through reforestation and Forest Conservation Bylaw protection.
- Positively impact more than 23,000 residents through outreach programs and events

To celebrate our success, residents and partners were engaged to highlight these achievements and obtain feedback on progress to date and direction for the future. The message was clear. York Region should continue with the Greening Strategy programs and investigate new opportunities to engage more people, respond to the changing demographic of the Region and meet the current environmental challenges.

~1,000,000

trees and shrubs planted

1,000+ HA

of environmental lands secured

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP
COUNCIL**

first public forest to receive Forest
Stewardship Council certification (2000)



"This is the best program!
I have already recommended it
to many of my friends who have
taken advantage of it."
Irina, resident of Richmond Hill,
the LEAF program participant

"It was very good. The kids loved it."
"One of the best Regional programs."
"It was excellent. Thank you."
Forest Festival participants

"...proud to be a partner in
York Region's Greening Strategy.
Together we have helped protect
more than 220 hectares of
significant woodland habitat."
Mark Stabb,
Nature Conservancy of Canada

"...proud to partner with
York Region over the past
10 years in the delivery of the
York Natural Planting Partnership
(YNPP). Through this program, we've
been able to encourage private property
owners to increase the amount of trees and
native plants on their properties, having
a tremendous positive impact on the
environmental health of the Lake
Simcoe watershed."
Mayor Virginia Hackson,
LSRCA Chair

GREENING STRATEGY

ACTION AREAS: PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND SECUREMENT

A healthy and connected system of features and linkages is essential to preserve the Region's natural heritage and biodiversity.

Through continued partnerships and investments, the Greening Strategy hopes to protect key lands while focusing on connections and enhancement of the York Region's Greenland System.

Goal: Protect core natural areas and restore linkages

Example: Since 2001 more than 1,000 hectares on 44 properties have been protected through land donation, easement and acquisition.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

1. Natural Environment Land Securement
2. Natural Heritage Trail linkages ***NEW***
3. Agricultural Land natural feature protection ***NEW***

ENHANCEMENT AND REHABILITATION

Healthy and sustainable natural environments support healthy and sustainable communities. Enhancement and rehabilitation techniques are utilized for all components of the natural environment, including forests, meadows, prairies, wetlands and streams.

Goal: Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on both public and private lands.

Example: The York Natural Planting Partnership (YNPP) program offers subsidized tree planting and support services for large scale restoration projects on private lands. Through our Conservation Authority delivery partnership, this program plants an average of 40,000 trees and shrubs each year.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

1. Private land tree planting
2. Species at Risk ***NEW***
3. Public land naturalization
4. Naturalization of Regional properties



BENEFITS FROM TREES:

REDUCTION IN ENERGY COSTS

Urban Forest Studies undertaken by York Region in partnership with local municipalities (Town of Richmond Hill, City of Vaughan and City of Markham) concluded that cumulative reduction in energy costs from the existing canopy cover is more than \$5 million.

These Action Areas have been refined from the original Strategy and provide a clear understanding of the direction for the Greening Strategy.

LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE

York Region continues to demonstrate leadership in the protection and promotion of the natural environment through its policies, programs and use of cutting-edge technologies. Through inclusive forums and technical working groups, the Greening Strategy provides opportunities for York Region, its partners and neighbouring Regions to share successes and challenges and learn from one another.

Goal: Seek and transfer knowledge and demonstrate leadership and innovation in the protection and promotion of the natural environment.

Example: In partnership with local municipalities York Region has applied the Urban Forest Study developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to measure and understand the benefits of York Region's urban forest. This information is being used to target efforts in enhancement and rehabilitation.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

1. Technology/Innovation
2. Sharing and dissemination of technical knowledge
3. Sustainable communities
4. Funding opportunities

STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION

Community awareness is vital to the protection of a healthy natural environment for future generations. Regional programs and initiatives under the Greening Strategy use a variety of methods to engage York Region residents.

Goal: Educate residents about the value of green infrastructure, provide opportunities to discover connections with nature and inspire action.

Example: Nature's Classroom is a long-standing program offering outdoor education to community groups in the York Regional Forest.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

1. Education programming
2. Outreach events
3. Public engagement through marketing



DELIVERY MECHANISMS AND TOOLS

Fundamental to the success of the Greening Strategy are the techniques that have been effectively used to maximize results.

PARTNERSHIPS, AGREEMENTS AND CONTRACTS

Many stakeholders in York Region are engaged in practices working towards a sustainable natural environment. The Greening Strategy co-ordinates with like-minded organizations to achieve a high level of performance from experienced delivery partners.

RESOURCE AND FINANCIAL LEVERAGING

By partnering with other like-minded organizations, York Region is able to leverage additional funds towards the Greening Strategy. Investment through agreements and partnerships for the delivery of programs and activities has experienced as much as five times the original York Region financial investment.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

With community involvement in many aspects of the Greening Strategy, greater understanding and support for the natural environment is achieved. Engagement of York Region residents through multi-media increases participation in programs and creates an overall awareness of the natural environment.

INCENTIVES

Incentives can be financial or service-oriented and may be linked to partners or existing senior government programs. In many cases, the Greening Strategy uses existing programs such as *Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts* program for securement of lands. Incentives increase uptake of programs and improves continuous program participation.

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The Greening Strategy continues to be involved in the development of natural environment policy and legislation. To ensure protection of the efforts of the Greening Strategy into the future, all programs are reviewed for consistency and designed to support current legislation and policies, such as the Forest Conservation Bylaw and York Region's Official Plan.



BENEFITS

The Greening Strategy protects, restores and creates green infrastructure which contributes to sustainable healthy communities.

Green infrastructure is defined as:

“Natural vegetative systems and green technologies that collectively provide society with a multitude of environmental, social and economic benefits.”

- *Green Infrastructure Coalition of Ontario (2012)*

Green infrastructure takes many forms, including forests, natural valleys, parks, gardens, landscaped areas, wetlands and storm water ponds.

The diagram below identifies the benefits of the Greening Strategy associated with each of our Action Areas, which are achievable and measurable, and contribute to successes (environmental, social and economic).



ACTION AREA IMPLEMENTATION

Designed through public consultation to provide a critical path, highlighting the primary activities and targets.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND SECUREMENT

	2013	2014	2015	2016
ENVIRONMENTAL LAND SECUREMENT				
Natural Environment Land Securement	Develop and seek approval of new and existing programs under new three-year agreement with Nature Conservancy of Canada and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust			
	Scope and evaluate new partnerships		Evaluate new and existing agreements and refine for 2016	
	Review securement strategy and criteria for consistency with current policy and legislation and revise accordingly			
	Target: Pursue a minimum of four secured sites or 60 hectares annually			
Natural Heritage Trail Linkages (NEW)	Participate in Strategic Planning exercise with York Region Long Range Planning			
	Review securement strategy and criteria for compatibility and revise accordingly			
	Scope opportunities and investigate delivery options including new partnership(s) e.g. Oak Ridges Trail Association, Lake Trail Initiatives, Pedestrian and Cycling Program		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
		Implement one pilot project to support Regional natural trail linkages and Active Transportation	Evaluate and implement one pilot project	
Agricultural land natural feature protection (NEW)	Review securement strategy and criteria for compatibility and revise accordingly			
	Scope opportunities and investigate delivery options including new partnership(s) e.g. Ontario Farmland Trust		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
	Co-host an Ontario Farmland Trust opportunities forum	Implement one pilot project with Ontario Farmland Trust	Evaluate pilot project and proceed accordingly	
TARGET: PURSUE A MINIMUM OF SIX SITES OR 65 HECTARES SECURED ANNUALLY				

LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE

	2013	2014	2015	2016
LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE				
Technology/Innovation		Work with local municipalities to develop urban forest management plans with local urban forest canopy targets		
	Continue to partner with local municipalities to complete urban forest studies			Report to council on Urban Forest Studies findings
	Update Forest cover mapping to review the Regional Official Plan and Forest Cover target of 25%			
Sharing and Transfer of Technical Knowledge	Municipal and agency Land Securement forums - facilitate two annually			
	Continue Environmental Advisory Committee forums - co-ordinate two annually in partnership with municipal EACs			
	Deliver conference presentations - submit two annually			
Sustainable Communities	Develop internal partnership with Health Protection and Healthy Living to maximize synergies and messaging			
	Develop focused input to strategic corporate initiatives regarding climate change			
Investigate Funding Opportunities	Investigate funding opportunities in all program areas to leverage funds and realize efficiencies			
TARGETS:				
• CO-ORDINATE FOUR INFORMATION SHARING FORUMS ANNUALLY				
• PRESENT AT TWO CONFERENCES ANNUALLY				
• SUBMIT THREE FUNDING APPLICATIONS ANNUALLY TO LEVERAGE FUNDING				



BENEFITS FROM TREES:

TWO MINUTES

Contact with nature has a positive effect on human health. Two minutes provides stress relief, two hours improves memory performance and attention span, and two days increase the levels of cancer fighting white blood cells by 50 per cent.
- David Suzuki Foundation

ACTION AREA IMPLEMENTATION

ENHANCEMENT AND REHABILITATION

	2013	2014	2015	2016
ENHANCEMENT AND REHABILITATION				
Private Land Tree Planting	Continue existing York Natural Planting Partnership (YNPP) a subsidized reforestation program under three-year agreement with two Conservation Authorities			
	Evaluate and refine YNPP annual targets		Evaluate YNPP agreements and refine for 2016	
	Continue existing Backyard Tree Planting program under new three-year agreement with Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF)			
			Evaluate Backyard Tree Planting agreement and refine for 2016	
		Investigate new planting opportunities with Conservation Authorities and other delivery partners		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate (2016-2017)
	Agricultural land natural feature protection - scope opportunities and investigate delivery options including new partnership(s) e.g. Alternate Land Use Services (ALUS) partnerships		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
	Target: 50,000 trees and shrubs planted annually			
Species at Risk (NEW)		Investigate opportunities to protect species and habitats at risk including partnership(s)	Implement opportunities and evaluate (2016-2017)	
Public Land Naturalization	Continue with community and local municipal naturalization program			
	Scope urban naturalization opportunities with local municipalities		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
	Evaluate Regional role in school yard naturalization including pilot project		Support/implement as recommended	
	Target: 7,000 trees and shrubs planted annually			
Naturalization of Regional Properties	Continue existing Adopt a Stream Crossing program (tree planting along watercourses with local schools)			
		Adopt a stream crossing program - evaluate program and scope partnership opportunities	Implement recommendations from evaluation (previous program targets or higher)	
	Continue prairie planting pilot project and existing York Region property naturalization implementation			
	Continue existing York Regional Forest reforestation and prairie habitat planting projects			
	Target: 15,000 trees and shrubs planted annually			
TARGET: A MINIMUM OF 70,000 TREES AND SHRUBS PLANTED ANNUALLY				

STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION

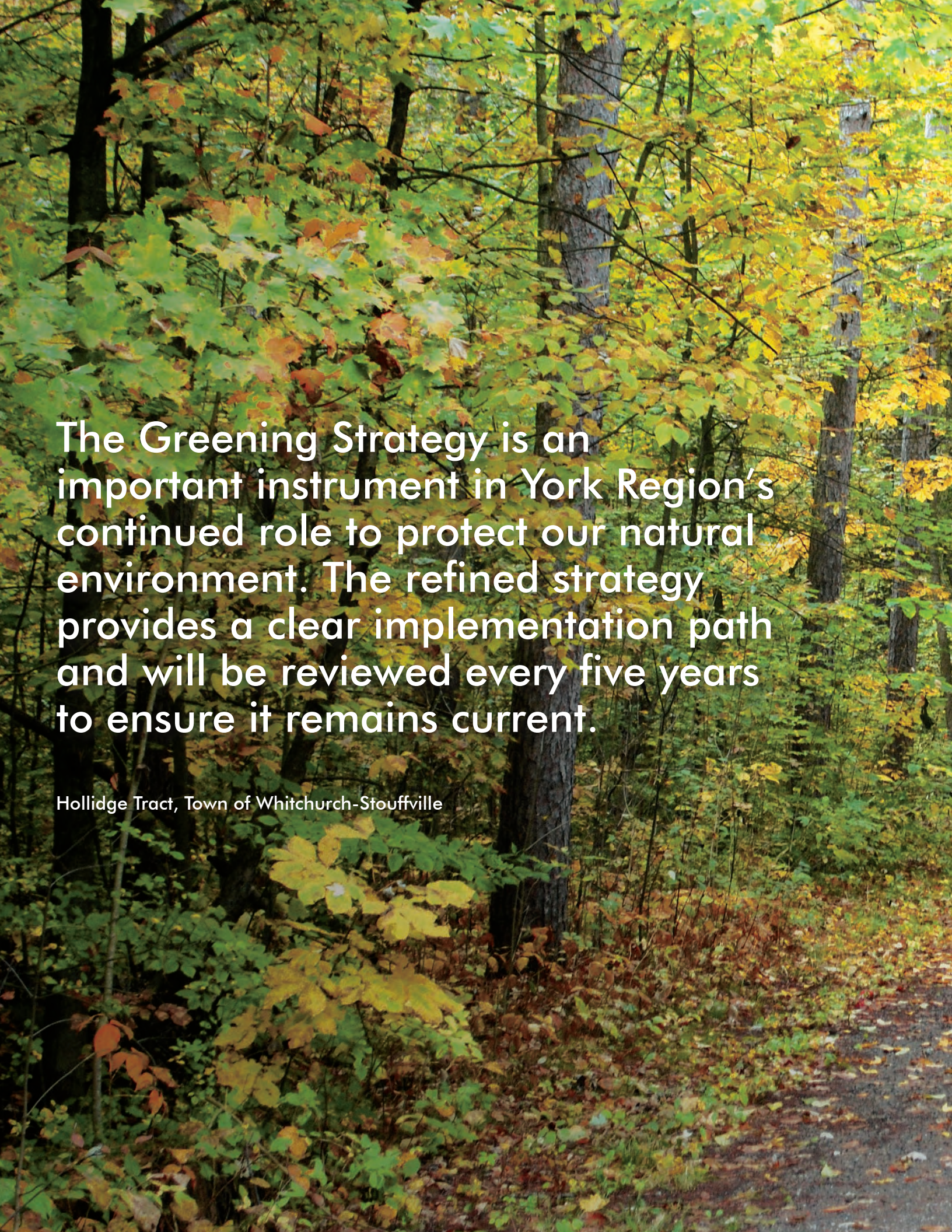
	2013	2014	2015	2016
	Continue existing Nature's Classroom environmental education program (target 45 community groups)			
		Nature's classroom - evaluate program and scope delivery options	Continue program as recommended	
	Continue existing Envirothon education program competition			
			Evaluate Envirothon program delivery and support	
		Co-ordinate Regional Envirothon Committee		
	Scope education partnership with school boards and/or other organizations		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
	Support educational programming which highlight the ecological value of agricultural land - scope opportunities including new delivery partnership		Implement partnership(s) and evaluate	
	Deliver 12 York Region Forest events annually			
		Evaluate forest event delivery efficiencies, maximum capacity and partnership opportunities	Continue program as recommended	
	Partner-led event participation in a minimum 10 events attended targeting 250 participants			
	Continue to co-ordinate volunteer planting events			
			Implement multicultural engagement recommendations	
		Implement social media recommendations		



BENEFITS FROM TREES:

INCREASE IN TREE CANOPY, DECREASE IN CRIME

A study in the Baltimore area found that a 10 per cent increase in tree canopy was associated with a 12 per cent decrease in crime.
- University of Vermont



The Greening Strategy is an important instrument in York Region's continued role to protect our natural environment. The refined strategy provides a clear implementation path and will be reviewed every five years to ensure it remains current.

Hollidge Tract, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville



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