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GREENLANDS PROPERTY SECUREMENT DIRECTIONS REPORT - SLOKKER PROPERTY

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 25, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works, Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and Commissioner of Corporate Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council authorize the contribution of the lesser of \$750,000, or 25% of the appraised value towards the acquisition of the Slokker Property located in the northeast quadrant of the Community of Nobleton, Township of King, as outlined in Option 4, Section 4 of this report; conditional upon:
 - The Region taking ownership of and managing the tablelands (approximately 95 acres); and,
 - The Province committing 50% of the funds (\$1,500,000) to the project in a timely fashion; and,
 - Successful fundraising by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT) for the balance of the purchase amount (\$750,000).
2. The Regional Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Chief Administrative Officer of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Executive Director of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust and the Clerk of the Township of King.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the staff recommendation on the partnership acquisition request of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT) (*see Attachment 1*) to purchase the Slokker property as part of the Regional Greening and Securement Strategies.

3. BACKGROUND

The Slokker property is a parcel of land, approximately 170 acres, located on the Oak Ridges Moraine northeast of Nobleton in the Township of King (*Attachment 2*). The TRCA and the ORMLT were approached by a local community group in Nobleton and

the Township of King to help secure this property. The TRCA and ORMLT have partnered on several land securement initiatives within their common areas of jurisdiction.

In the fall of 2003, staff of the TRCA and the ORMLT presented York Region Transportation and Works and Planning and Development Services Department staff with the Slokker acquisition opportunity for funding consideration under the Greening and Securement Strategies. The TRCA and the ORMLT have negotiated a tentative purchase agreement on the property, subject to obtaining the required funding and necessary approvals.

It is estimated that the total acquisition costs, including legal fees, appraisal, environmental audit, GST and Land Transfer Tax, etc. will be \$3,000,000. In compliance with the TRCA Board direction, they are seeking funding from a number of partners as follows:

Province (50%)	\$1,500,000
York Region (25%)	\$750,000
Other Fundraising* (25%)	\$750,000

* General public and residents of the Township of King, the City of Toronto, other potential and regular fundraising sources, i.e. the ORMLT and the Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto, and a potential income tax receipt to the landowner for a portion of the purchase price, etc.

On a per acre basis, the total acquisition cost (including administration costs) is approximately \$17,650/acre. The total request of York Region (\$750,000) equates to approximately \$4,400/acre.

The TRCA is proposing that they hold title and the ORMLT hold a conservation easement on title.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

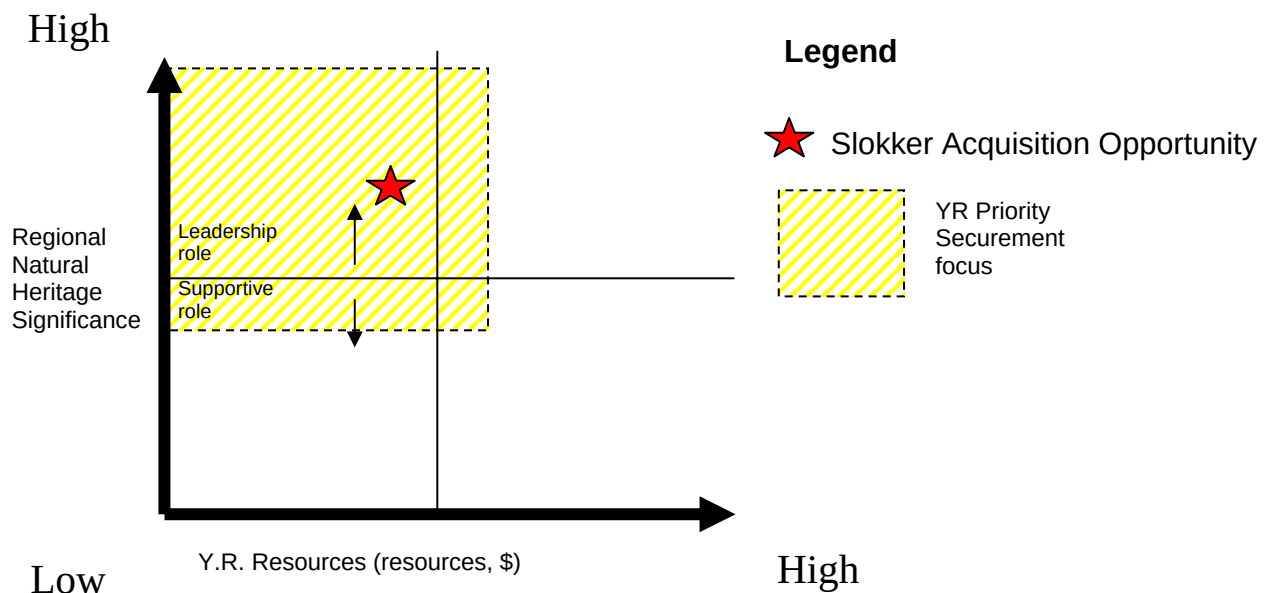
The Regional Internal Evaluation Team (IET) for securement initiatives has reviewed this acquisition opportunity against the Regional Securement Criteria. Members of the IET have also visited the site with Natural Heritage and Forestry Services Section staff.

The site has numerous environmentally significant features and has the potential to provide connectivity between the Black Duck Wetland complex, a Provincially Significant Wetland and the East Humber River. The subject lands present opportunities to rehabilitate woodlands, increase forest cover, and improve habitat for the abundant wildlife in the area (*Attachment 3*). The property also provides an excellent opportunity to increase the trail system in the Township of King and within the Region with eventual connections possible between the Humber Trails area and the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail.

When assessed against the Regional Securement Criteria, this property is deemed a high priority for Regional involvement particularly as it provides an opportunity to protect a north south linkage, establish a new east west linkage and allow for reforestation; an opportunity to increase forest cover. This acquisition is also strategic in that the property is not protected from incompatible development by policy.

Figure 1 further identifies this securement opportunity on the Regional Priority Matrix introduced in the Securement Criteria Report (assuming all other funding partners are in place). Given the resources requested of the Region (\$750,000), assessed on a per acre basis (\$4,400/acre), and the Natural Heritage significance to the Region, this opportunity is a strategic fit with our securement program.

Figure 1
Regional Priority Matrix



4.1 York Regional Forest Expansion into King Township

Given the significant amount of funding assistance being requested of the Region, staff has considered the option of making funding conditional on Regional ownership and management of the tableland portion of the Slokker property as a new Regional Forest Tract in King Township.

A visit to the site has confirmed that successful reforestation of the land is feasible. Regional management of this land will result in a slight increase in Regional Forest operational costs given its geographic separation from existing forest tracts currently part of the York Regional Forest. However, use of existing York Regional Forest tracts by residents of the west portion of the Region (King Township and the City of Vaughan) is

limited, likely by the travel distance required to the existing forest tracts. This strategic expansion of the York Regional Forest would provide a significant benefit to these residents. Further, Nature's Classroom, the Region's Forest Education Program, presently offers little in terms of programming for community and school groups in King and Vaughan. This site, and the educational and interpretive opportunities it provides, will expand Nature's Classroom opportunities to a significant portion of the Region's population.

Staff has considered the risk management implications of operating these tablelands as a Regional Forest Tract. Currently, there is no significant evidence of misuse of the property by motorized vehicles or other inappropriate uses. An increase in population will eventually occur in the immediate area with full build out of the Nobleton Community Plan. Through TRCA ownership of the valleylands, the tableland portion proposed to be owned and managed by the Region will be separated from the proposed new development. As such, staff anticipates that trespass issues and inappropriate use of the tablelands will be minimal.

4.2 York Region Securement Options

The per acre amount being requested of the Region is reasonable at approximately \$4,400/acre. The Region is being requested to contribute significantly more than the TRCA under the proposed scenario, and the TRCA is proposed as the future land owner. As such, staff has considered a number of funding scenarios as outlined below. Following each option (in italics) is the staff opinion of the option.

Option 1 – Deny the request for funding.

This option was not pursued in light of the high value of the opportunity when assessed against the Regional Securement Criteria.

Option 2 – Provide the requested \$750,000 and agree to the proposed ownership and conservation easement scenario.

The proposal by the TRCA and the ORMLT includes TRCA ownership of the entire property. However, in light of the significant financial contribution being requested of the Region, and no firm commitment from the TRCA to financially support the acquisition (fundraising only), Regional ownership and management is the preferred option.

Option 3 – Provide a lesser amount and agree to the proposed ownership and conservation easement scenario.

This option is still a viable option. However, given the score when assessed against the Regional Securement Criteria, the requested amount is not inappropriate.

Option 4 (Recommended) – Provide the requested \$750,000 conditional upon the Region taking ownership of the tablelands (approximately 95 acres) to own and operate as a new Regional Forest Tract. Valley lands to be held by the TRCA to consolidate with their significant holdings in the Humber River Valley system.

The request for the Region to contribute 25% of the total cost is significant. For the reasons discussed in Section 4.1, the opportunities provided to the Region through ownership and management of the tablelands are significant and should be pursued.

Option 5 – Provide the Requested \$750,000 conditional upon the Region taking ownership of the entire 170 acre parcel.

Over the last several decades, the TRCA has been extremely successful in acquiring and managing land within the Humber River watershed, specifically valley lands. It is therefore recommended that the valley lands go into TRCA ownership to consolidate with their already significant land holdings in the area. Further, as discussed in section 4.1, TRCA ownership of the valley lands (Option 4) is preferred over this option as it will create a natural buffer between the proposed adjacent development to the west and the potential new Regional Forest Tract.

Note: All scenarios that involve Regional funding would be conditional upon the Province committing to the requested \$1,500,000 and successful fundraising by the ORMLT and the TRCA for the remaining \$750,000 in a timely fashion.

A number of other scenarios were considered consisting of different combinations of the above noted scenarios.

4.3 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

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, phased in over 2001 and 2002. With a per acre cost to the Region of approximately \$4,400, the total purchase price is \$750,000.

The Greenlands Property Securement Reserve currently has approximately \$2,800,000. As such, there are sufficient funds in the reserve to participate in the Slokker property acquisition at the requested amount.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Securement Strategy. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through securement initiatives, local municipalities benefit from the multiple enhancements to both their communities and the natural environment. The Corporation of the Township of King is fully supportive of the public acquisition of this property. The Township has indicated it may participate as a funding partner or through supporting the fundraising efforts. This proposed expansion of the Regional Forest in the Township of King has the potential to increase forest cover, improve overall environmental health, provide easy access to a Regional Forest tract for residents of the west and southwestern portions of the Region and make programs such as Nature's Classroom available to a greater number of Regional residents in all nine local municipalities.

7. CONCLUSION

The Internal Evaluation Team (IET) for Securement Initiatives has reviewed and assessed this opportunity for the acquisition of strategic Greenlands properties. Acquisition of the Slokker property is a high priority as supported by its assessment against the Regional Securement Criteria. This acquisition also provides an opportunity to expand the York Regional Forest and increase forest cover. Staff recommends that the Region contribute \$750,000 to the Slokker property acquisition, conditional upon Regional ownership and management of the tablelands, and all other funding partners committing to the requested amounts.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Regional Clerk's office.)