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AREA 2C NATURAL HERITAGE STRATEGY, TOWN OF AURORA

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 19, 2003, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

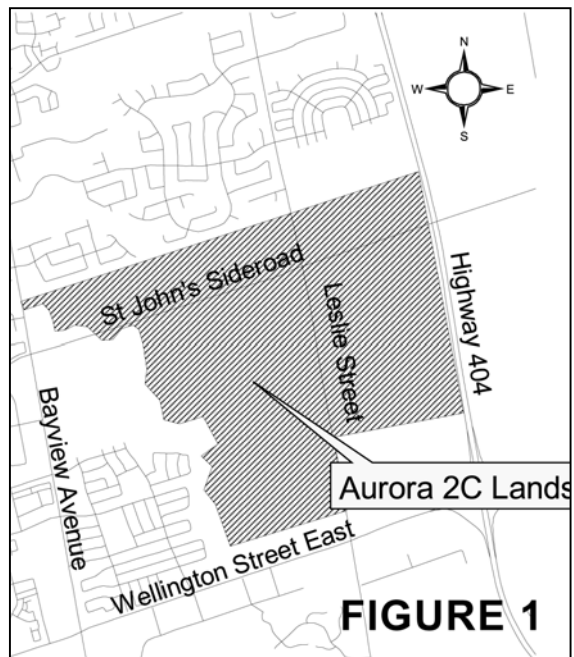
1. Regional staff work with the Town of Aurora in preparing terms of reference for a natural heritage strategy for the Area 2C lands.
2. Staff report back on the findings and recommendations of the natural heritage strategy as it affects the Regional Greenlands System for the Area 2C lands as part of any proposed urban expansion amendment to the Regional Official Plan.

2. PURPOSE

The Region has been asked to work with the Town of Aurora in preparing Terms of Reference for a natural heritage strategy for the Area 2C lands, and to determine whether any changes to the Regional Greenland System as depicted in the Region Official Plan (ROP) are warranted. This report is intended to provide some context and understanding of the Region's involvement in this process, as well as to seek Council's endorsement to assist.

3. BACKGROUND

The Area 2C lands in northeastern Aurora represent the last major remaining part of Aurora that could be used to accommodate future urban uses. The lands are irregular in shape and are situated south of the Aurora/Newmarket boundary west of Highway 404, north of Wellington Street and east of the East Branch of the Holland River (see Figure 1). In total, the lands comprise approximately 425 hectares (1,050 acres) of land currently designated *Rural Policy Area* and *Regional Greenlands System* in the Regional Official Plan.



As part of Aurora's five-year official plan review the Town established a Steering Committee and commissioned a variety of studies assessing growth management options and strategies. The Steering Committee noted that any proposed growth should not happen prematurely nor compromise the integrity of the environmental features and functions of the Town.

These background studies provide a foundation for a Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) application to expand the Town's existing urban area, and respond to the criteria for Urban Area expansions set out in the Community Building Policies of the Regional Official Plan.

Aurora Council on July 15, 2003, adopted a resolution requesting the Region work with the Town to prepare terms of reference for a baseline analysis of the environmental features and functions within the 2C Area. The analysis will be used to substantiate any changes to the Region's Greenland System Official Plan schedules and provide sufficient policy detail to form the basis of a Secondary Plan for the area.

Aurora Council requested the terms of reference be presented for its consideration as soon as possible.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Any proposed expansion of Aurora's existing urban area will necessitate an amendment to the Regional Official Plan (ROP), and in turn require an assessment of the Region's Community Building Policies as set out in Section 5.2.3 of the ROP. Among other matters, Section 5.2.3 requires that any proposed urban expansion address the protection and integration of the Regional Greenlands in addition to addressing the Region's policies regarding sustainable natural environment.

The Area 2C lands are traversed by both the East Branch of the Holland River and Wesley Creek, and are partially affected by the East Aurora Wetland Complex, a Provincially Significant wetland re-evaluated by the Province in 1999. There are also a number of tableland woodlots located west of Leslie Street.

A considerable amount of environmental and scientific information already exists for this general area, in part owing to previous work completed for the Town of Aurora as part of an earlier urban expansion exercise, and in part owing to information available through the Province and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. The natural heritage system for the Area 2C lands will build upon this work and will provide a level of detail sufficient to support a Secondary Plan.

In order to assist area municipalities in complying with the requirements of the ROP, the Region has previously participated in joint studies and offered staffing resources and expertise in the development of natural heritage strategies. Staff has assisted with similar studies in Georgina, East Gwillimbury, King, Newmarket and Richmond Hill.

This work will further the terrestrial natural heritage goals of the Region as set out in the Official Plan and reflected in the Regional Greenlands System and the general Greening Policies.

4.1 Relationship to Vision 2026

One of the goal statements in the Region's Vision 2026 notes that *"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 order to achieve this goal, the Region working with area municipalities, will focus on ensuring the protection and enhancement of the features and functions contributing towards a healthy environment.

The Region’s participation and assistance in the preparation of a natural heritage strategy for the Area 2C lands will further this goal.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time and resources will be required to develop the terms of reference, participate in the consultant selection process and sit on the technical advisory committee. The Region has not been asked to financially contribute towards the cost of this study. No additional costs are anticipated.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Town of Aurora intends to undertake a baseline analysis of the environmental features and functions within the 2C Area in order to provide sufficient policy detail to form the basis of a Secondary Plan and to substantiate any changes to the Region’s Greenland System. The Town has requested the Region’s assistance in developing the terms of reference for this study, our participation in the consultant selection process and on the technical advisory committee. Our involvement and assistance early in the project will contribute towards the study’s successful compliance with Regional policy and assist Aurora in completing a timely and comprehensive review.

7. CONCLUSION

The Town of Aurora has asked the Region to assist and participate in preparing Terms of Reference for a natural heritage strategy for the Area 2C lands, and to determine whether any changes to the Regional Greenlands System as depicted in the Region Official Plan are warranted.

This work will further the terrestrial natural heritage goals of the Region as set out in the Official Plan and reflected in the Regional Greenlands System, the Region’s general Greening Policies and Vision 2026.

Staff is recommending the Region work with the Town of Aurora in preparing terms of reference for a natural heritage strategy for the Area 2C lands, and report back on the findings and recommendations of the natural heritage strategy as it affects the Regional Greenlands System as part of any proposed urban expansion amendment to the Regional Official Plan.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.