

Clause 5 in Report No. 7 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on April 21, 2016.

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York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group Update

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated April 1, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:

1. Receipt of the deputation by Kim Empringham, Chair, York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.
2. Adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated April 1, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:
 1. York Region support Agri-food related initiatives of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group work plan.
 2. York Region continue to engage the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance on a project-by-project basis.

Report dated April 1, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner now follows:

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. York Region support Agri-food related initiatives of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group work plan.
2. York Region continue to engage the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance on a project-by-project basis.

2. Purpose

This report updates Council on the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group's 2015 activities and planned activities for 2016. It also discusses the work the Region is doing with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance.

3. Background

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was established by Regional Council in 2001 to provide advice on the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming in the Region

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The group is similar to agricultural advisory committees that have been established in the Regions of Halton, Peel and Durham. It is currently made up of seven members representing:

- Holland Marsh Growers Association
- York Federation of Agriculture
- York Farm Fresh Association
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
- Markham and East York Agricultural Society
- York Region Food Network
- Regional Municipality of York

Two York Region Planning and Economic Development staff also provide administrative and procedural support to the Liaison Group.

The goals of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group are to support the agricultural industry and to promote healthy rural communities

The goals of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group are to:

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- Assist The Regional Municipality of York in its efforts to protect agricultural lands as a natural resource of importance to the economic viability of the Region
- Recognize and promote York Region's farmers and agricultural organizations as valuable contributors to the community and the economy of the Region
- Promote healthy rural communities that contain living, working and recreational opportunities, and that respect the natural environment and resources

Since its inception, the Liaison Group continues to play an important role in overseeing initiatives that connect residents to local farmers and markets, creating opportunities for engaging the agricultural community in addressing regulatory challenges, and assisting farmers with issues that affect their ability to successfully operate their businesses.

The Liaison Group leads important on-going education, awareness and marketing initiatives and over the past several years it has been instrumental in the development, oversight and promotion of the York Region Farm Fresh initiatives.

The Liaison Group also plays a major role in the development and distribution of York Region's Farm Business Survey, in ensuring the York Region Transportation Master Plan and the Regional Official Plan include appropriate considerations for the agricultural community, and in the planning and development of events such as Agri-Business Tours, which raise awareness of the regulatory challenges faced by the many farmers and food-processing operators located in York Region.

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group achieved much in 2015

In 2015, the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group adopted an annual work plan and delivered on the following initiatives:

- oversaw the development of the annual Farm Fresh and Pumpkin Pie Trail Map, 15,000 maps were printed and distributed throughout York Region and surrounding areas
- participated in and provided comments on the coordinated Provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the York Region Official Plan review
- organized a day long Innovation-focused Agri-Food Facility Tour of a variety of locations in Northumberland County and Durham Region. This

was attended by 23 people including elected officials, local municipal and regional staff and agri-food industry operators

- hosted a joint-meeting of York Region-based Agricultural Associations to share updates on initiatives and opportunities to collaborate. Attendees included representatives from the York Region Federation of Agriculture; the Markham Agriculture Advisory Committee; the Georgina Agricultural Advisory Committee; the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance; and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

In the latter part of 2015, the Liaison Group also developed a plan to complete a York Region Farm Fresh Association market study to determine the industry's interest in formally re-launching the association and what role it would play. With support from York Region and the York Region Federation of Agriculture, this initiative was launched in January 2016 and will be completed in the spring.

York Region has also been actively engaged in addressing broader agriculture policy issues through the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance

Established in 2005, the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA-AAC) is a partnership involving the four regional municipalities of Halton, Peel, York and Durham, the four Greater Toronto Area Federations of Agriculture (Halton, Peel, York and Durham), the City of Toronto, Toronto Food Policy Council, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and the food sector.

In 2011, GTA-AAC secured 2012 and 2013 funding from Friends of the Greenbelt for staff support to ensure the implementation of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan. This resulted in the creation of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA), which currently includes representation from the following:

- Niagara Agricultural Policy and Action Committee
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- Friends of the Greenbelt
- Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
- Holland Marsh Growers' Association
- Durham College
- Country Heritage Park
- Ontario Ministry of Food and Agriculture
- Ecosource
- Food and Beverage Ontario
- Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, York and Cities of Hamilton and Toronto

- local representatives from the food and farming industry

The purpose of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance is to identify pathways for a more integrated and coordinated approach to food and farming viability in the area, and to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retains, enhances and expands its role as a leading food and farming cluster in North America.

Since the formation of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, Regional Council has appointed a member of Council to represent the Region on the Board of Directors of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance. Presently, York Region's representative is Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Justin Altmann.

Two York Region Planning & Economic Development staff are also engaged with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance at the Working Group level. Their role is to participate in the planning of projects identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Work Plan.

4. Analysis and Options

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group has developed an ambitious work plan for 2016

Building on the successes of 2015 and to deliver on their goals, the 2016 York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group work plan includes the following policy, education and awareness/marketing initiatives:

- an update of the York Region Farm Fresh and Pumpkin Pie Trail Map
- collaborate with the York Region Food Network to develop a "*York Region Food 4 Change*" event in the spring
- complete a York Region Farm Fresh Association market study
- participate in the review of the York Region Official Plan
- participate in Phase 2 of the coordinated Provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan
- develop an Agri-Food Business Development event in conjunction with the York Small Business Enterprise Centre
- investigate the opportunity to conduct a Farm Land Tax Rate Study in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the York Region

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Federation of Agriculture, the Regional Municipality of York and local municipalities

- host two joint-meetings of York Region-based Agricultural Associations
- organize regular meetings of the Liaison Group membership

York Region actively funds Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Initiatives

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance is not a legal entity, which prevents York Region from entering into a formal funding agreement with them. As an alternative, York Region currently provides funds to the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance on a project-by-project basis to directly support initiatives that have been identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Work Plan, with future funding contingent on the outcome of each project.

Since 2013, York Region has provided a total of \$69,000 to support the completion of the following initiatives:

- 2013: provided \$9,000 toward an Agriculture and Agri-Food Economic Profile for the Golden Horseshoe
- 2014: provided \$30,000 to complete the Golden Horseshoe Agri-food Asset Map Project; completed in December 2015
- 2016: provided \$30,000 to support a Municipal Local Food Procurement Project also involving Hamilton, Halton and Durham and to develop and host an Agricultural TED Talk event

York Region staff will continue to work with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance to support initiatives and monitor progress and results.

It is necessary to balance support between local and broader agri-food initiatives

York Region recognizes the need to provide support for local and for broader-based agri-food initiatives. To ensure the interests of the Region's agri-food industry operators are given priority, opportunities must be vetted and resources applied based on the alignment of initiatives with the interests of the local agri-food community.

Current resources for agri-food related initiatives should be applied to items that support the mandate and work plan of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group. Where there is alignment between the Liaison Group's plan and

Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance initiatives, York Region will provide resources as necessary and available.

This approach ensures that York Region's resources will be directed toward initiatives that align with the goals of York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The mandate and activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group support the following Regional Council-approved plans:

- *Vision 2051*: the 'A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System' goal area
- *York Region Official Plan – 2010*: Chapter 6, Agricultural and Rural Areas
- *2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan*: strategic priority area – 'Manage Environmentally Sustainable Growth' and 'Strengthening the Region's Economy'
- *SMART Living Plan*: Food Waste Reduction Strategy – Good Food Program, which promotes buying local farm fresh food to help residents gain a better connection and appreciation for their food and discourages food waste

5. Financial Implications

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is supported by two York Region staff in the Planning and Economic Development Branch of the Corporate Services Department – one each from Long Range Planning and Economic Strategy.

Staff and administrative support costs are included in the approved 2016 Planning and Economic Development Branch budget.

6. Local Municipal Impact

The mandate of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group supports and complements the goals and interests of all the Region's municipal partners.

Given these shared interests, staff from the Region's municipal partners have been, and will continue to be, engaged in the initiatives undertaken by the Liaison Group.

7. Conclusion

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was formed by Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. Through the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group, input and ideas to help the Region and its municipal partners support the rural economy are gathered, shared and put into action.

Historically, York Region has leveraged the Liaison Group to support local agri-food initiatives and have provided funding to the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance to support broader Regional initiatives on a project-by-project basis where relevant.

York Region will continue to give priority to supporting Agri-food related initiatives in the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group work plan, and as resources become available, provide financial support to Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance initiatives on a project-by-project basis.

For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at ext. 71503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report. April 1, 2016

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